

From Information to Action: Tools for Improving Community Participation in Education



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From Information to Action: Tools for Improving Community Participation in Education

Eileen Kane
and
Joyce Wolf

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Minimum system requirements

1. IBM compatible personal computer.
2. 32-bit Windows operating system: Microsoft Windows 95, 98, 2000, or NT.
3. Microsoft Internet Explorer, version 4.0 or greater.
(Note: Internet access is not required, only Internet Explorer). During installation, the program will search your computer for the correct version of Explorer, and, if necessary, install it.
4. Minimum of 16 megabytes RAM for Windows 95/98, 32 megabytes of RAM for Windows NT/2000.
5. Hard disk with at least 20 megabytes of free space.

Installation

1. Put the CD-ROM disk into your CD-ROM drive.
 2. Installation program should start automatically.
- Follow the instructions on your screen.

If the installation program does not start automatically:

1. Click "Start" on the task bar.
2. Choose "Settings," then "Control Panel."
3. Double-click "Add/Remove Programs."
4. Click "Install."
5. Follow the instructions on your screen.

Installation time will vary, depending on your version of Internet Explorer.

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Preface

Given the current stress in the educational systems of many countries, communities may increasingly have to take on new roles if their children are to participate in a quality education. Research has shown the powerful impact that community support for and monitoring of local schools can have. For real, lasting change to occur in schooling, community members need the skills and motivation to play a decision-making role and to be able to pass on that understanding to others—other community members, other communities, and new generations. For these reasons, many countries have in recent years begun to adopt programs that support the involvement of communities in education.

Three years ago, when community participation was first becoming an important component of basic education programs, the authors published *Planning for Community Participation in Education*. This software tool, which brought together the experiences of many countries, was designed to assist governments and donors in planning education programs that would involve communities. The wide acceptance of that software tool made it clear that people were interested in learning about a variety of approaches to community involvement. It has also demonstrated the ability of a software tool to bring together a large amount of material and to organize the information in a manner that allows easy access and illustrates relationships.

From Information to Action: Tools for Improving Community Participation in Education adopts a similar approach, which is to use a software tool to distribute information about community participation in education. It begins where the planning process of the previous tool ended, focusing on how to actually design and implement programs with community participation. We hope that this software program will find its way onto the computers of the people all over the world who are working to assist communities in helping their children receive a basic education.



Julie Owen-Rea

Office of Sustainable Development

Bureau for Africa

U.S. Agency for International Development

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About this Toolkit

This Toolkit shows how to work with communities to create local involvement in basic education programs:

- how to get the community information you need to make programs more relevant
- how to share information with the community
- how to use information to develop programs

It also explains some basic information-getting tools that you can use to carry out these tasks. Although all of our examples relate to education, what you learn here can be used for programs in other sectors as well.

About community involvement

Research has shown that there is a correlation between effective, committed community participation and the success of development initiatives. Community involvement leads to:

- better identification of needs
- more appropriate activities
- better use of local resources
- more effective implementation
- more sustainable programs

The philosophies underlying community involvement owe a lot to the thinking of writers such as Freire, Illich and Faure, who were concerned with community involvement in education. Community involvement in education encourages:

- greater equity and democracy
- greater "ownership" of and responsiveness toward the school
- increasing recognition of the value of education for all

But program planners, policymakers and educators have practical concerns as well. Increasing community involvement in education can lead to

- more resources for the school
- greater relevance of the school, in terms of culture, curriculum, and schedules
- reduction of the work burden of teachers and principals
- the addition of another, often very well-informed, voice

If you would like to learn more about how community involvement can help education, another Toolkit in this series, *Community Participation in Education* (Wolf, Kane and Strickland, 1997) shows how community involvement has been used to achieve a wide range of educational goals and strategies.

About you

You may be a planner, administrator, or educator working at the national, regional, or local level in a government department, an agency or a research institution. You might like to get a better idea of how to work with communities. You want to use this knowledge to get the community more involved in education programs. The “community” may be a single village, a town, a neighborhood—or it may be many of these, if you are working on a large program.

But in planning and implementing these programs, you also want the community to work with you. This involvement may be quite modest—asking the community to share local insights to improve an organization’s planning and implementation; or it may be more participatory—working with communities in a more active partnership throughout the life of a program. This computer Toolkit will show you both approaches—organization-centered and participatory—and how they work.

To achieve your aims of better education programs based on greater community involvement, you will need to learn more about the community, its problems, and its resources; you will have to share information with the communities, and you will need to use what you have learned to help design better programs.

But as you use the Toolkit, remember that you are not alone in your task of improving education: the “you” in the text can be an individual, an organization-based team, or

a team consisting of you and the community, depending on the degree of participation built into the work.

What the Toolkit can do for you

The Toolkit will help you to:

- design more appropriate programs based on community input
- involve the community more in the design and implementation process
- plan your institution's approach to working with the community (What steps need to be taken?)
- work more effectively with consultants ("Participation" and "community involvement" mean many things to many people. How can you insure that your institution and the consultant are working cooperatively in the most effective way?)
- plan your institution's training needs (What areas in the Toolkit reflect skills already present in your institution? What skills do you need to develop?)

How the Toolkit is organized

The Toolkit has two major sections. Each section has a number of subsections beneath it. At the end of this manual, you will see some basic instructions on how to use them.

The two major sections and their subsections are:

1. Tools for getting and sharing information

- *Tools for getting information* shows a variety of research techniques for getting useful information to create better education programs, such as surveys and focus groups. It shows you the strengths and weaknesses of each. It also provides some “tips” on sampling, combining techniques, theory, and common mistakes that researchers make.
- *Tools for sharing information* shows a number of examples of how sharing information can improve community involvement in education: by **informing** people about education, through institutions and through the media; by **persuading** people to participate, through social marketing, social mobilization and performance, such as drama; and by **empowering** people through incentives to participate—building local organizations to develop and strengthen community involvement, and training community members in activities necessary for school participation.

2. Tools for achieving action

Tools for achieving action is a process that has three major parts. Each part shows two ways of carrying out

the necessary tasks to improve education through greater community participation: working through the standard structures and processes of your organization, or working with the community through a more participatory approach. You can choose either, or in some cases, combine them. The parts of the process are:

- *Identifying problems and causes*, which shows how to discover community problems and their causes
- *Identifying and assessing strategies*, which shows how to work out what might address the community's education problems, and how to choose among possible options
- *Creating an action plan*, which helps to work through the stages needed to translate the information you have collected into activities to help the community

Some ways you can use the Toolkit

You can use the Toolkit:

...as a library of tools and processes for working with the community:

- Perhaps you want to carry out a basic survey. Is this the best tool, and if so, what does it involve?

- You need to know how to share information with the community: what are some ways of doing that?
- You want to design a program in a more participatory way—how do you get people's input? Their thoughts on what their problems are? Their ideas on some ways of addressing them? How do you find out which tasks the community might carry out, and which ones an external agency might do?

The Toolkit can be used to get information on any one of these topics.

...for working through a process

Effective action requires getting useful information on needs, priorities, constraints and resources; sharing it; using it to decide what to do; and working out how it will be done. This process is *iterative*—that is, what you learn in one stage determines what you will do in the next. You can use the Toolkit to follow this sequence.

...as a way of thinking about development and the rights and responsibilities of all of the partners involved

The theoretical discussions contained in the Toolkit give a foundation for thinking about working with the community.

...for supporting greater empowerment of local people

The word “empowerment” has many meanings, and some people rightly point out that the term loses its effectiveness when often used carelessly to embrace anything from raising people’s awareness to inciting revolutions. In this Toolkit, “empowerment” means helping communities to use participation to:

- reflect on the causes of problems and what to do about them
- take effective action to achieve their goals

In this way of thinking, participation is a means to empowerment, not simply an end in itself.

Organization-centered versus participatory approaches

Look at the sections under “Tools for achieving action.” Some of them are labeled “organization-centered approach”; others are called “participatory approach.” Why are both included as ways of involving the community in education?

You may recognize the value of involving communities in planning better education programs, especially programs whose implementation will rely heavily on community involvement. However, if you work within an organization, you have certain constraints—the organization has a

clearly defined mission that may not correspond exactly to the community's ideas; and it has procedures that you are expected to follow. Who is at the center of the planning process—your organization, or the community?

The Toolkit reflects a realistic approach to this question. Most organizations have structural and procedural barriers to participation, but some of these can be modified to allow more community input. The "organization-centered approaches" in the "Tools for Achieving Action" sections in the Toolkit will give you some examples.

On the other hand, not every problem is amenable to community involvement, and not everything done by communities is "participatory." The Toolkit takes a pragmatic approach, and tries to address these issues in the "participatory approach" sections in the "Tools for Achieving Action" section of the Toolkit.

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Africa Bureau Information Center
U.S. Agency for International Development
1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 1425
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